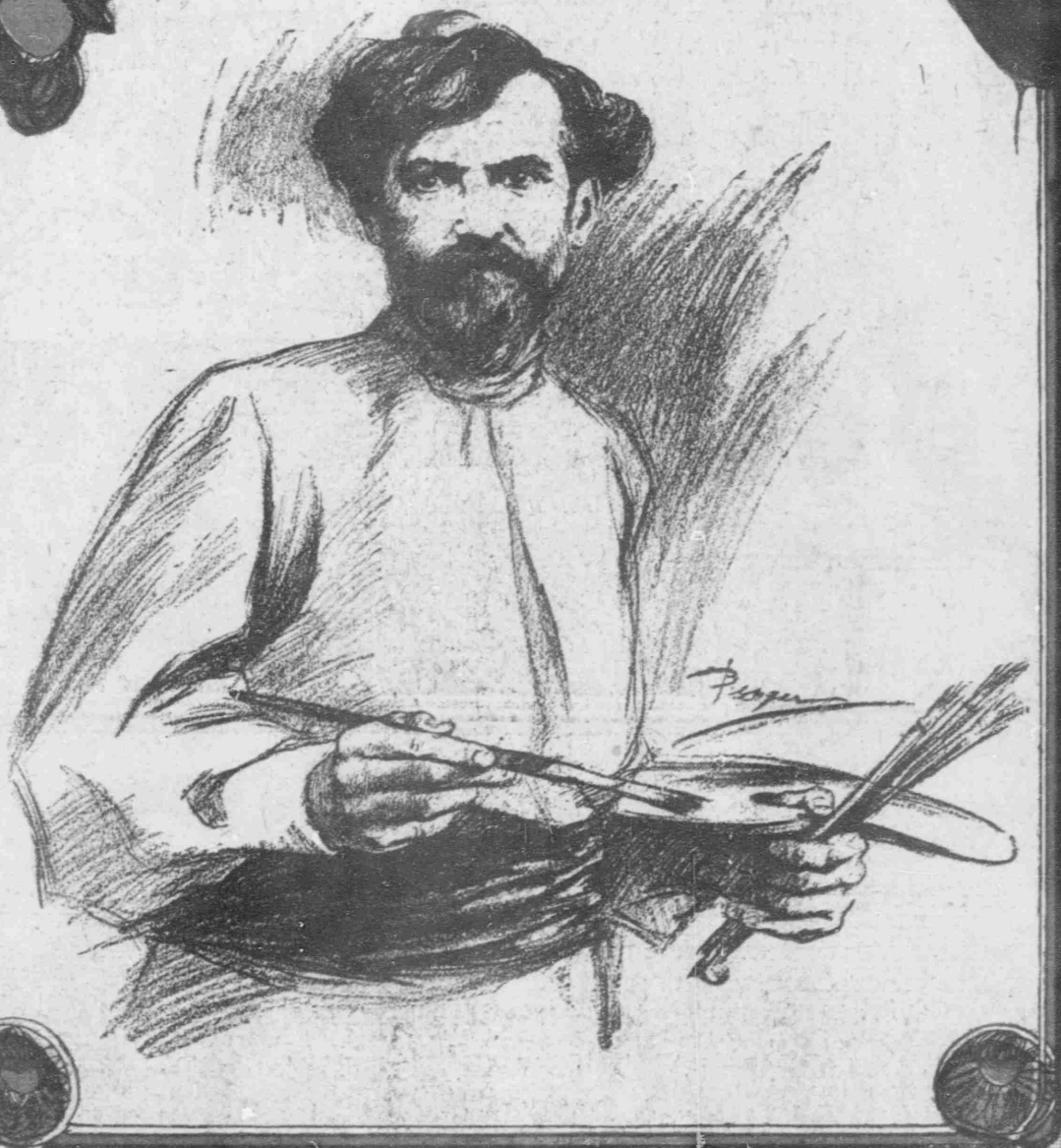


MUCHA

THE LIFE AND WORK
OF THE GREATEST
DECORATIVE ARTIST
IN THE WORLD



ALPHONSE MUCHA. Sketched from life by Berger for this paper.



Roses



Lilies

Mucha—An Appreciation

OFTEN those of us who were students of the Latin Quarter in Paris would come face to face with such renowned painters as Bonnat, the late Edouard Degas, and Carolus-Duran.

Often we would cross the street to pass them as closely as possible, and in return to our bow or reverential salute Bonnat would smile benevolently, Degas would give a nervous, half-irritated little nod, while Duran, the trifling, the exquisite, would remove his tall, flat-brimmed hat and flourish it gracefully in appreciation of the homage paid him.

But, dearly as we sought these meetings, there was one artist who, though at that time only on the threshold of greatness, created more sensation as he stalked up the Boulevard St. Michel than did any of his better-known confreres. And that artist was Alphonse Mucha.

The secret of Mucha's popularity was not far to seek. At that time he had

when Mucha became recognized as a power in the world of art, but letters that I received subsequently from all sorts and conditions of men told me that the greater success Mucha achieved the more lovable his disposition became, and the more noble his ideals.

To-day he has reached the highest pinnacle of his fame. Often in the days gone by he confided to me an ambition that he cherished to restore to his beloved adopted country the truest traditions of the Graeco-Latin ideals of art, and his efforts in this direction have been as numerous as they have been effective.

The dominant note of his genius is shown in his decorative work, yet his more serious inspirations combine all the weird power of Gustave Dore with the magnificent architectural effect of Alma Tadema.

If an artist is one who is able to abstract from nature all that is beautiful then Mucha is an artist in the truest sense of the word.

Yet it was as a son of the people that Mucha popularized his art. There has been perhaps no painter, past or present, who has achieved greater popularity in his time.

He has delighted the street and at the same time has refined the public taste. His finest compositions adorn workshop interiors. The student collects them, the artist admires them, while the girl gazette adorns her boudoir with some work bearing the magic signature "Mucha."

And in spite of the fact that his art has become that of the people of the street, he has lost nothing of the distinction which has added to the luster of the world of art, and which has enriched the public taste to an almost unprecedented degree.

Shortly after he gave to the world his tragic and weird Salome, "Empress and courtesan, but always Queen," an ill-mannered young critic remarked that the work was very much after the style of Gustave Moreau.

The humility of Mucha's disposition was typified by his answer, "Moreau," he said, with a puzzled expression, taking his critic's hand, "how can I ex-



Mucha
1904

press my appreciation for so great a compliment."

The life of Mucha reads more like a brilliant romance than an actual fact.

Born at Ivancev in Moravia, Austria, Mucha first studied art at Munich, surrounded by poverty, and often suffering actual privation. Any kind of work was acceptable when it could be procured, and more often than not the unfortunate boy was unable to eke out a bare existence.

From Munich he drifted to Vienna, and from there to the great center of the world's art—Paris. But fickle fortune refused to reverse her wheel, and after some months of suffering in the gay city, with breaking heart but still undeterred, he endeavored to return to his birthplace by beating his way on a freight train.

At a remote village he was discovered and forcibly put off the train and, without prospects or money, wandered for a time about the surrounding country. This incident, unimportant as it seemed, was the turning point of the young artist's career.

Directed by chance to the residence of a rich and artistic nobleman in the neighborhood who required some decorations restored, Mucha presented himself at the castle at Emmahaut and was given the work, which he did most creditably.

The nobleman was delighted and forthwith became the patron of the young artist, whom he sent back to Paris.

Here Mucha developed that originality of style which has become so much a part of his work, and which has made his fame as an artist secure for all time.

I recall with something akin to amusement the horror I experienced on hearing the late James McNeill Whistler pass what at the time I considered a slighting remark on one of Mucha's earlier posters.

"The young man is a great draughtsman," said Whistler, with that suspicion of airy malice which was so typical of the man, "but he has yet to grasp the great truth that an artist should be the interpreter of his own generation, and that his proper subjects

lie not in etherialized women, nor in those things that are thought picturesque, merely because they are strange, but in the streets, clothes, actions and appearances of to-day."

Yet I know that hanging in Whistler's studio were posters of Mucha's, and to a daring young student who had the temerity to ask why he decorated his studio with "paper" when he could have surrounded himself with priceless original works of contemporaneous artists, he answered briefly, "Oh, teach young fools like you how to draw."

Mucha realized early that imagination is the most powerful and the most elevating force in the world of art, enabling its possessor to understand his fellow-creatures, to put himself in their place, to idealize them and therefore to love them.

A great work of art stimulates the imagination, and that is why it is great. It is a truth, tragic if you like, but nevertheless a truth that the imagination, if not properly stimulated, will draw an otherwise great mind away from the world and from charity, instead of increasing that quick and intense universal sympathy which the truest artist endeavors to cultivate.

And this is where Mucha is supreme. To-day he is recognized as the greatest artist of his time in his own sphere of work.

And no one grudges him his enviable reputation. He is too well beloved by all.

His beautiful study of "Friendship" on the first page of this section is a charming allegorical sketch of America and France, and interprets in truly poetic spirit the bond of sympathy between the old country and the new, the elder women and the younger, as he has depicted them.

This is the sole work of the talented Roumanian-Frenchman to be given to the press during his stay in America, at ranks with his best and every lover of art will appreciate the skill of the master hand that so faithfully portrayed the traditional friendship between the two great nations.

By J. Hayden-Clarendon

By WM. DE LEFTWICH DODGE.

THE advent of Mucha into this country is propitious. He will be cordially welcomed. Undoubtedly he stands at the head of his own school, especially in that class of artistic poster which has made this name famous.

His great success lies in his wonderful control of his "line," by which I mean the "poetry of line" which makes his drawings so original.

So much do I admire the man and his work that I cannot say anything that would convey my true appreciation of it.

"Friendship" is typically Mucha. I envy the possessor of so valuable and artistic a drawing. Its conception is delightful.

BY FREDERIC DIELMAN,

President of the American Academy of Design.

I FIND the design "Friendship" a most charming one, showing as it does M. Mucha's well-known and altogether delightful characteristics, and cordially congratulate the paper upon having secured it for its pages.

The relationship between France and America has been happily typified by the two figures in the drawing, as in matters of art America has been most particularly the foster child of France, and is still greatly under her guidance.

M. Mucha's work is too well known and admired by the artists of this country to need any eulogy from me. It is valued more highly, perhaps, than that of any other artist active in his chosen field.